



A Call to Minimize Distraction & Respect Users' Attention

By a concerned PM & entrepreneur

[go/distraction](#)

I'm concerned about how we're
making the world **more distracted**

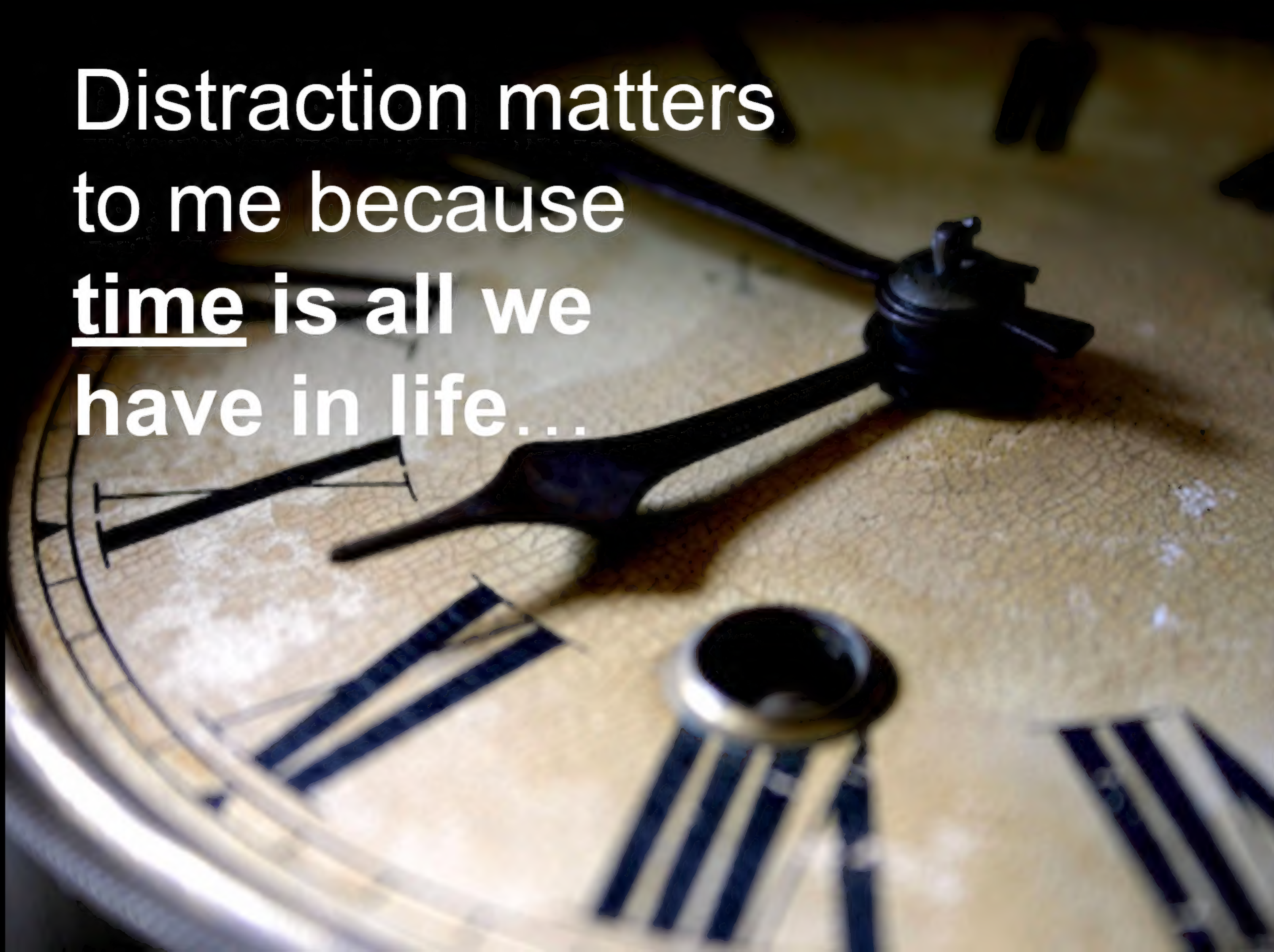
And my goal with this presentation
is to **create a movement** at Google...

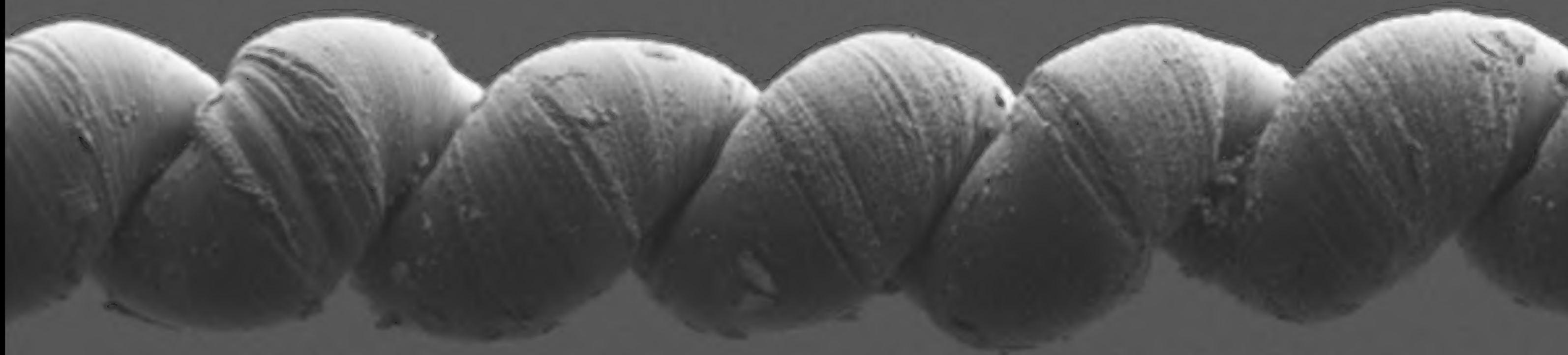
... to create a new design ethic that
aims to **minimize distraction**

**and I'd like to
get your help.**

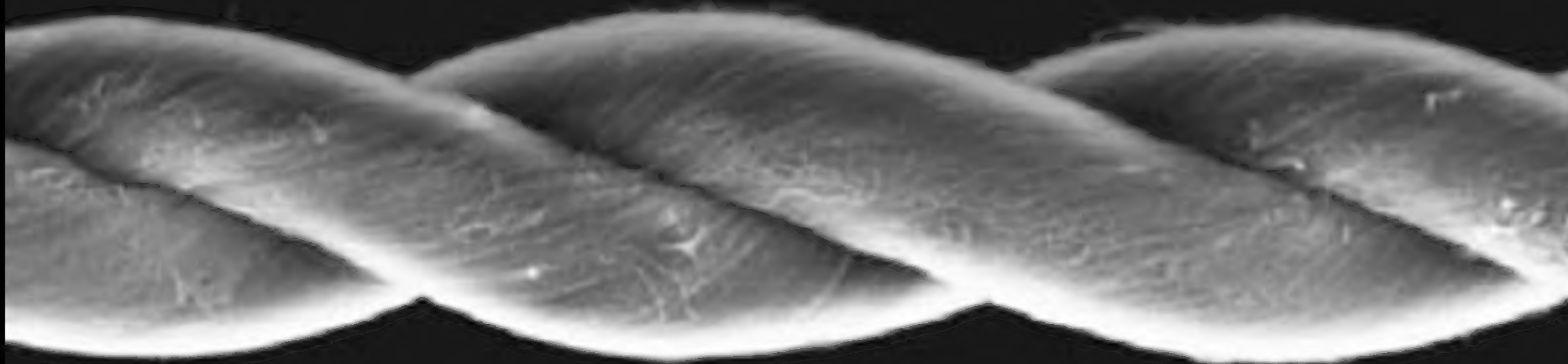


Distraction matters
to me because
time is all we
have in life....

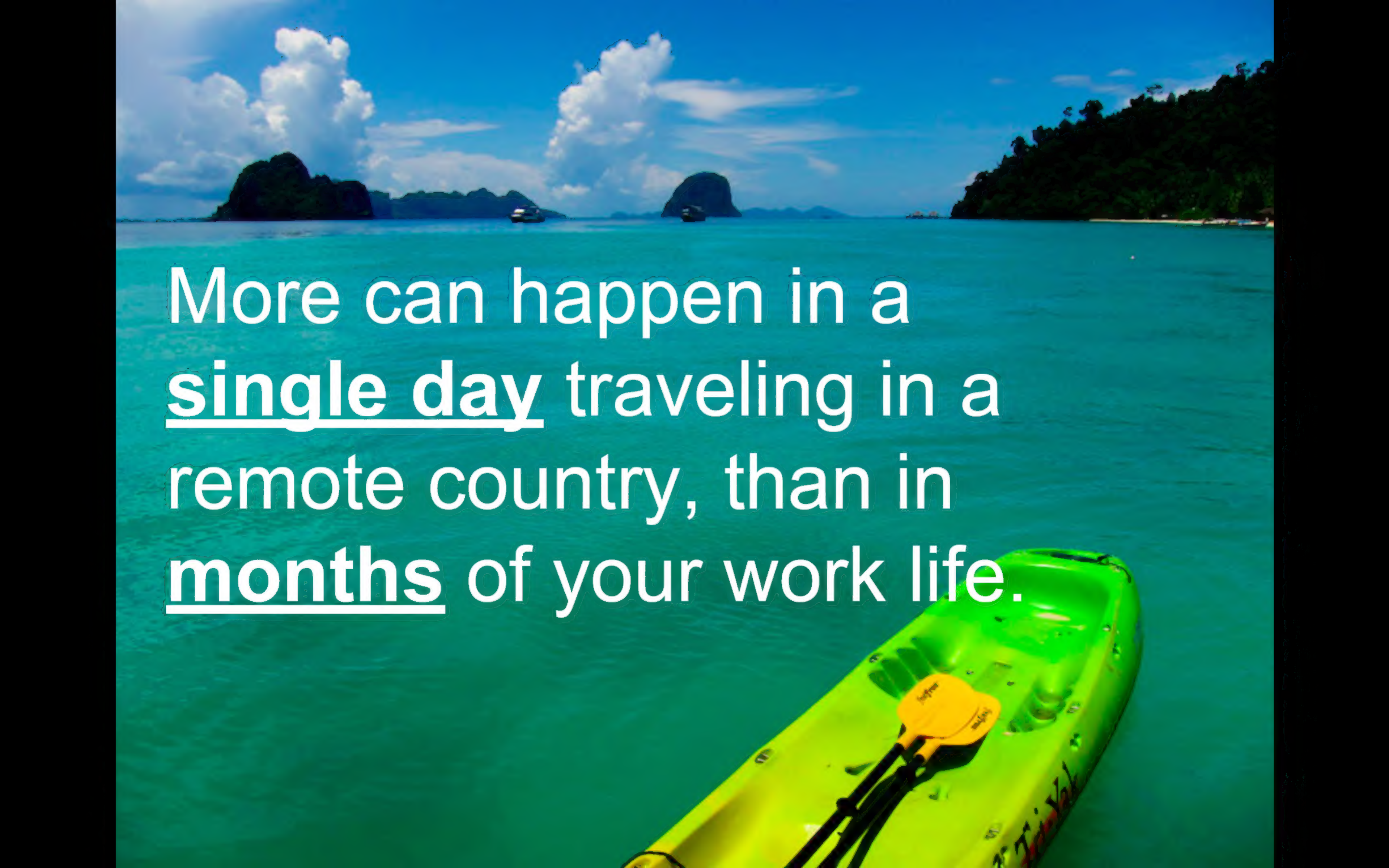




... time is expanded and contracted when
we're in flow vs. distracted.



You've experienced
this before...

A vibrant tropical seascape with turquoise water, distant islands, and a bright yellow kayak in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds. In the background, several dark, forested islands are visible on the horizon. A small boat is seen in the distance. The foreground features a bright yellow kayak with a black paddle resting inside it. The text is overlaid on the water, with the words 'single day' and 'months' underlined.

More can happen in a
single day traveling in a
remote country, than in
months of your work life.

A man and a woman are dancing on a stage. The woman, on the left, has blonde hair and is wearing a gold, sequined, strapless dress and high heels. She is smiling and has her arms outstretched. The man, on the right, is wearing a yellow short-sleeved shirt and black pants with a gold stripe down the side. He is looking towards the woman and has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a stage with blue and purple lighting and a large screen displaying a cityscape. The floor is a polished wooden dance floor with a circular pattern.

Or in one hour
of dancing...



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Mail



Archive

Report spam

Delete



Move to

Labels

More



1 - 15 of 15



COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

Starred

Sent Mail

Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more

Chat

Hiking Fan

Set email preferences

Call me

Ariel

Emily

Michael

Paul

Paul



Jason Cornwell

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1:10 pm



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Mar 28



Kenneth, me (2)

» Group dinner? - Sushi sounds great! On Fri, Mar 25, 2011 at 10:06 AM, Ken

Mar 25



Kenneth, me (2)

» Long time! - Hey Ken! Things have been really good! And lunch sounds gree

Mar 24



Michael Bolognino

» This weekend - Hi there. Let's meet up at 8PM tonight for burgers and then t

Mar 24



Arielle Reinstein

» Hike on the coast - Hi Arielle, I was thinking of going to the coast for a hike

Mar 24



Jason Toff

» How are you? - Hey there. We haven't spoken in a while. How are you? Wou

Mar 24



Jason Toff

» Vacation in the forest - I was doing a little bit of research for VW's in Tac

Mar 6



Google Voice

» New voicemail from (610) 810-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from (610) 810-5507

Mar 6

Google Docs, Google Maps, and Google

Yet hours and hours can
mysteriously get lost here....



facebook

Search for people, places and things



Timeline

News Feed

All Photos

Home

About

Photos

Videos

Groups

Marketplace

Events

Pages

Live

Help

Settings

Privacy

Security

Account

Mobile

Desktop

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook

Facebook



And feeds that suck huge
chunks of time away here...

A photograph of three young men standing in a wooded area. The man on the left wears a yellow beanie and a purple jacket over a grey shirt, looking down at a smartphone. The man in the middle has curly brown hair and wears a green jacket, also looking at a phone. The man on the right wears a grey beanie with a reindeer pattern, glasses, and a grey jacket, looking at his phone. The background shows trees and a wooden building. A semi-transparent black box with white text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

**...weakening our relationships to
each other here**



...and destroying our kids'
ability to focus here

(teens 13-17 now send 4,000 texts/month,
once every 6 minutes awake)

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous illuminated buildings and a large body of water in the background. The text "And today..." is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

And today...

Technology companies
profoundly influence where
all this attention goes...

In fact...



Never before in history...

...have the decisions of a **handful** of designers...



(mostly men, white, living in SF, aged 25-35)



... working at 3 companies ...

Google



facebook

had

SO

much

A close-up photograph capturing the moment of impact between a red boxing glove and a brown leather punching bag. The glove is positioned on the left, its fingers curled as it strikes the bag. The bag is a large, cylindrical object made of brown leather, hanging from a chain. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and foliage. The word "impact" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image, partially overlapping the glove and the bag.

impact

on how millions of people around the
world spend their attention



think about that for a second...



We should **feel...**

A pair of hands, one from the bottom left and one from the bottom right, are gently holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe shows blue oceans, green landmasses, and white clouds. The background is solid black, making the globe and hands stand out. The text is overlaid on the center of the globe.

...an enormous responsibility

A pair of hands, one on the left and one on the right, are shown holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe is tilted, showing the Americas and parts of Europe and Africa. The oceans are a deep blue, and the continents are green with some yellowish-brown areas representing land. The hands are a warm, golden-brown color. The background is a solid black. Overlaid on the center of the globe is the text "to get this right." in a white, sans-serif font.

to get this right.

The Washington Post

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[washingtonpost.com](#) > [Metro](#)

28 percent of accidents involve talking, texting on cellphones

By *Ashley Halsey III*
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, January 13, 2010

Twenty-eight percent of traffic accidents occur when people talk on cellphones or send text messages while driving, according to a study released Tuesday by the [National Safety Council](#).

THIS STORY

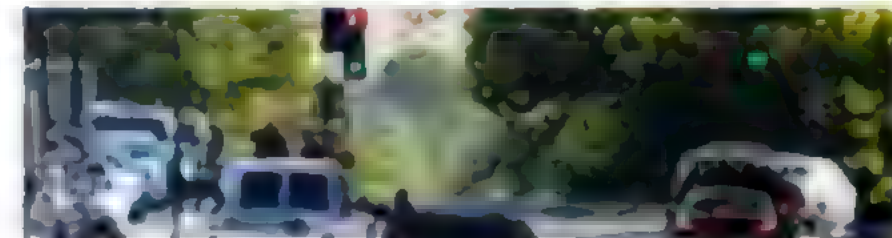
- [More drivers texting on Beltway, study](#)

up Network News


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**We need to be more rigorous
about these questions than...**

A person with long brown hair is seen from the back, sitting at a desk. In front of them is a large computer monitor displaying a webpage. To the left of the monitor is an open laptop with a black keyboard. The background shows an office environment with other people and desks.

“Why don't we make it buzz your phone every time you get an email?”

Now, you might be saying...

Wait a sec, don't users make
their **own choices** here?

Not always...

1. We need to acknowledge that humans have certain **vulnerabilities**...



2. Those vulnerabilities can be amplified and exploited...



3. ... and the design of products we make can do this, and make people act impulsively..



Every day, those **vulnerabilities** make us
act against our better judgement...

Vulnerability #1: Bad Forecasting (aka “That won't take long”)

facebook

[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

See Photo

Go to Notifications

what question are we
really being asked?

facebook

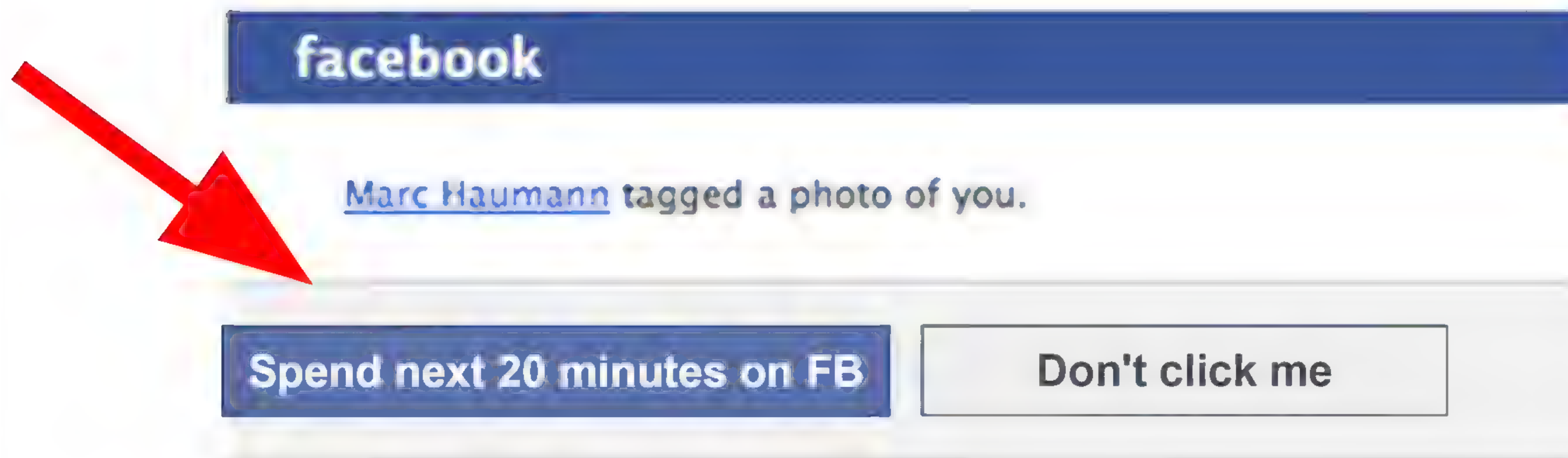
[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

See Photo

Go to Notifications

“Want to see this photo of you?”

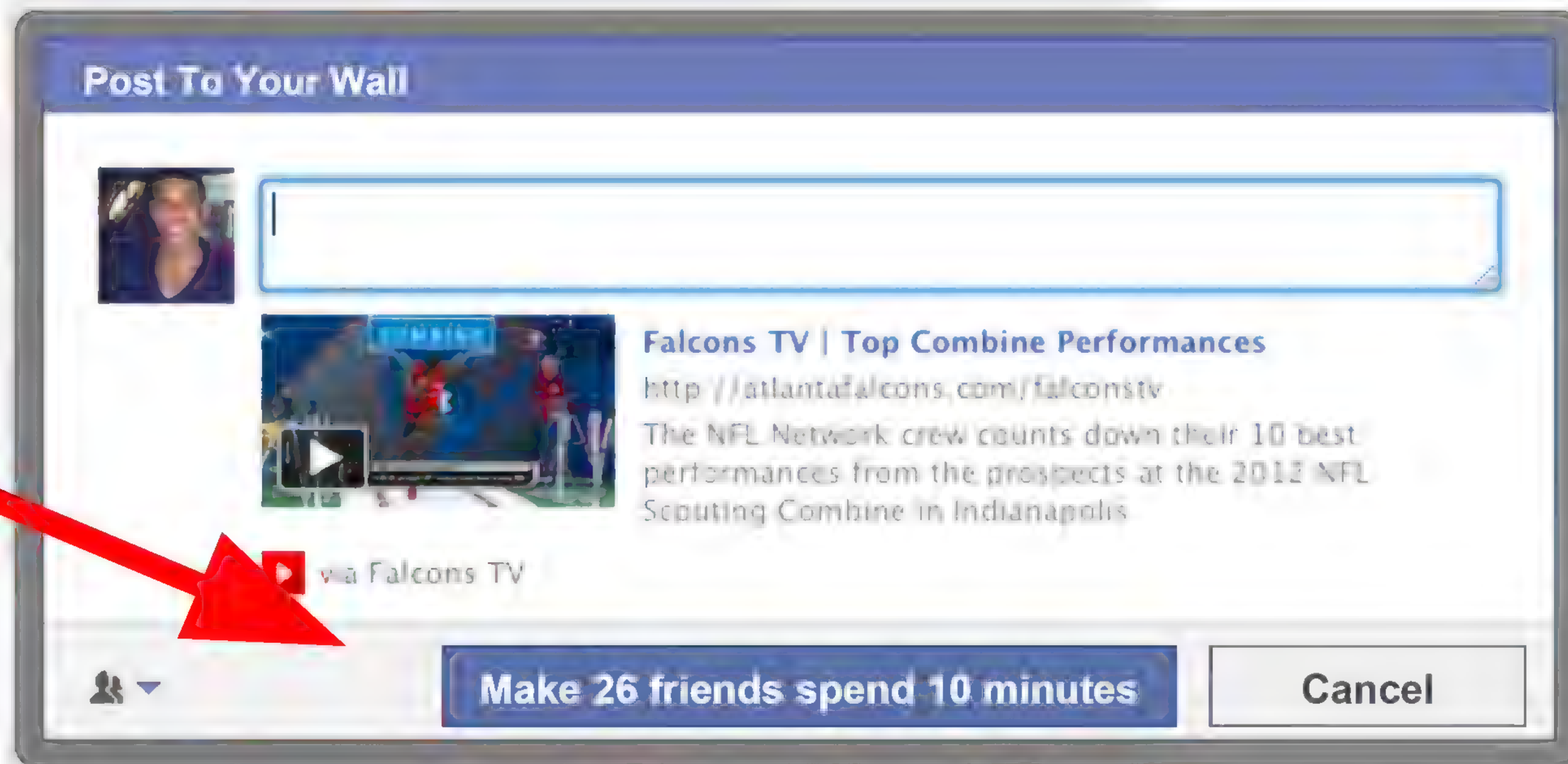
or more like...



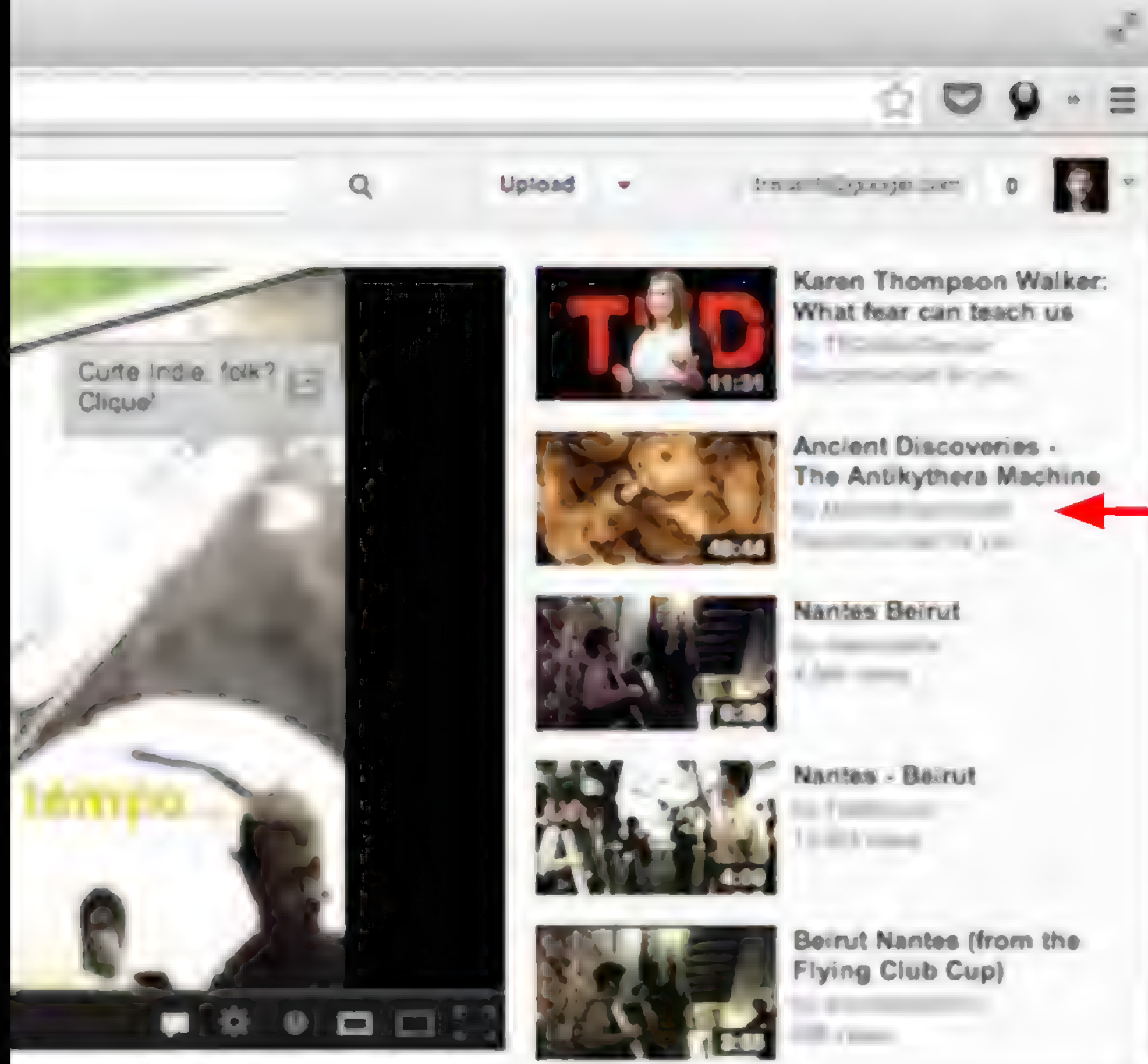
“Do you want to interrupt what you're doing and spend next 20 minutes on Facebook?”



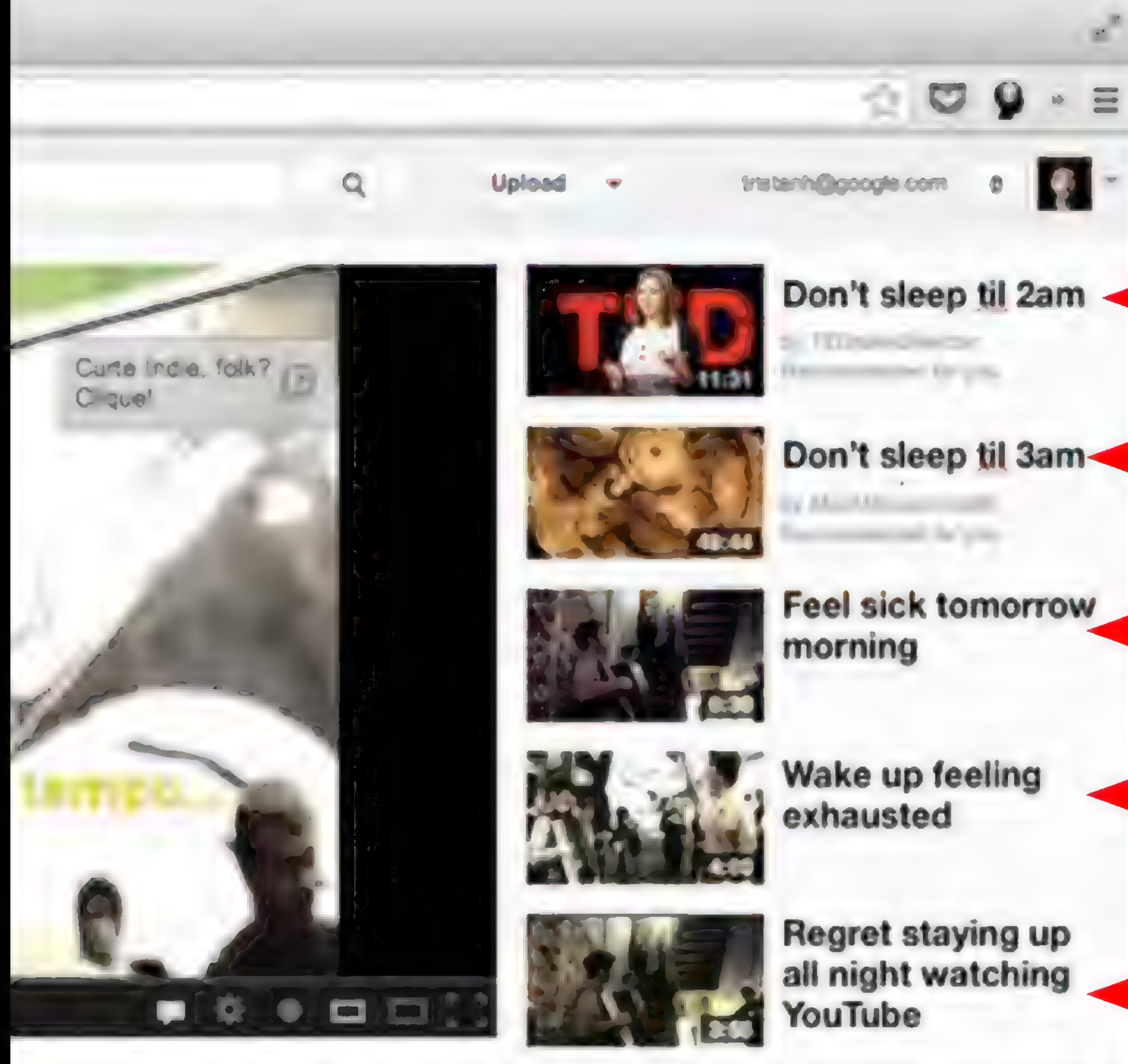
“Share this article?”



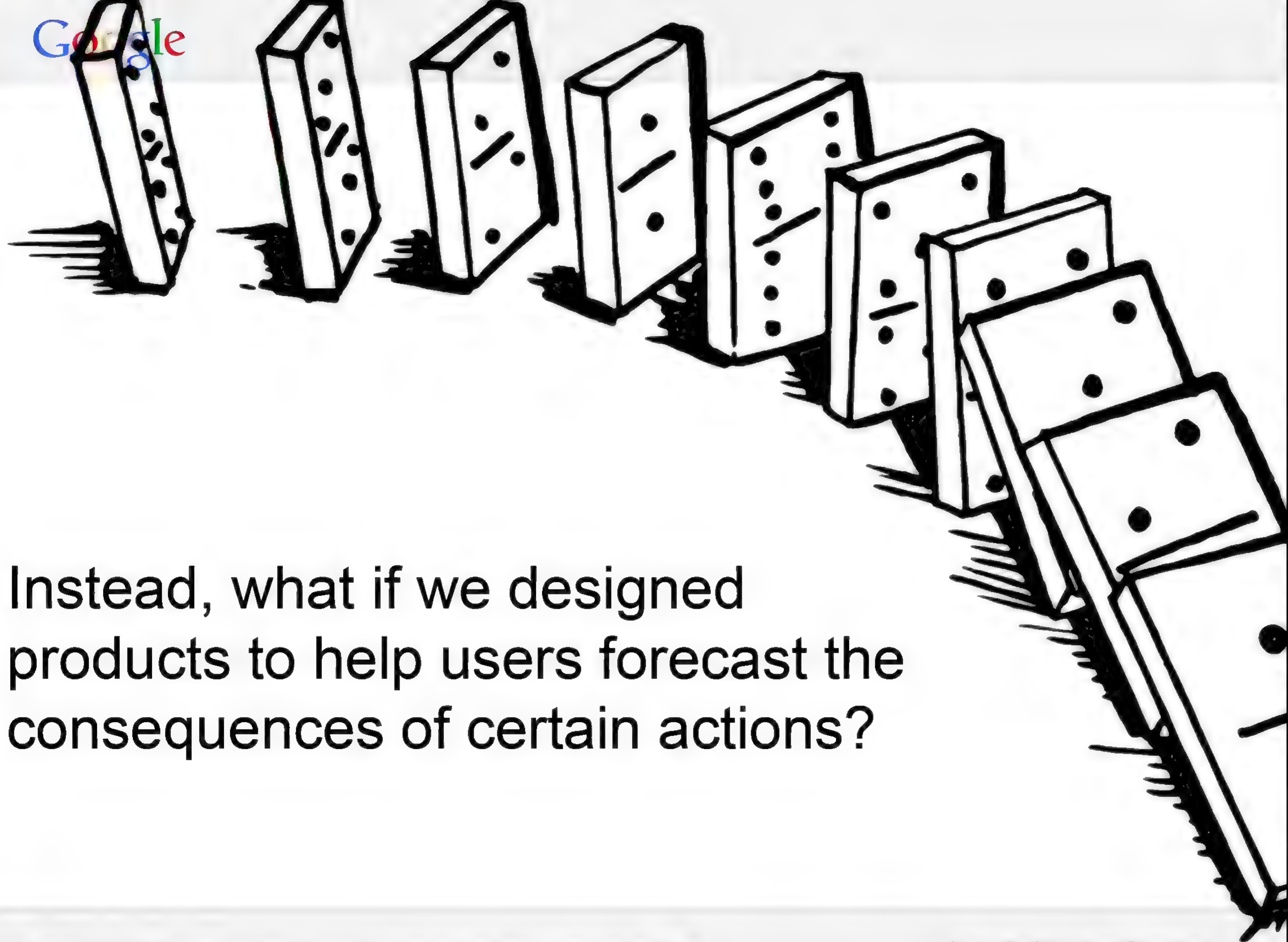
“Make ~26 friends spend 10 minutes reading this?”



**Watch a
related
video?**




or...



Instead, what if we designed products to help users forecast the consequences of certain actions?

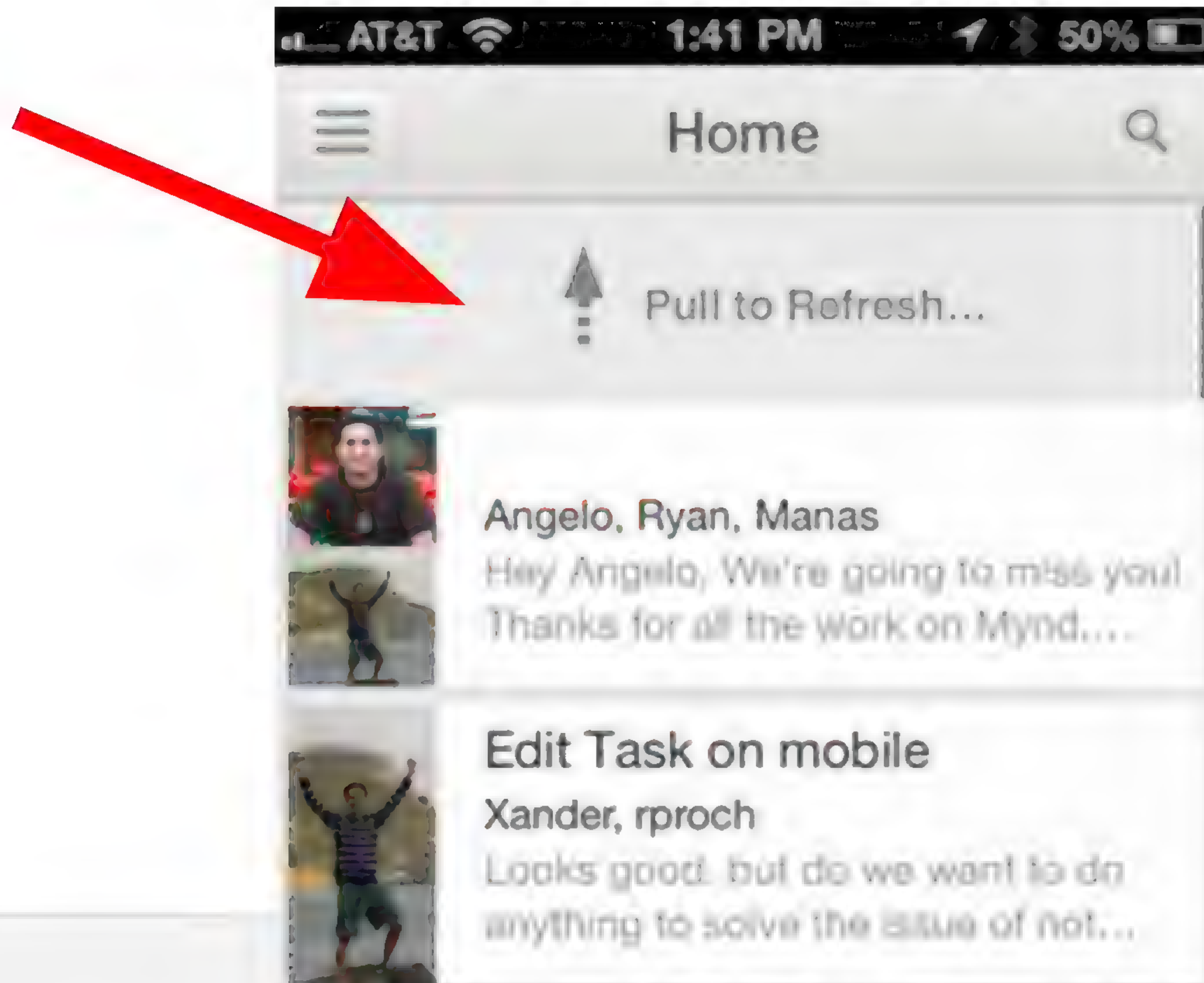
Vulnerability #2: Intermittent variable rewards (aka Slot Machines)

A photograph of a busy casino floor. In the foreground, a man in a light-colored shirt is playing a slot machine. Behind him, another person is also playing a slot machine. The background is filled with rows of slot machines and other casino games. The lighting is bright and colorful, typical of a casino environment.

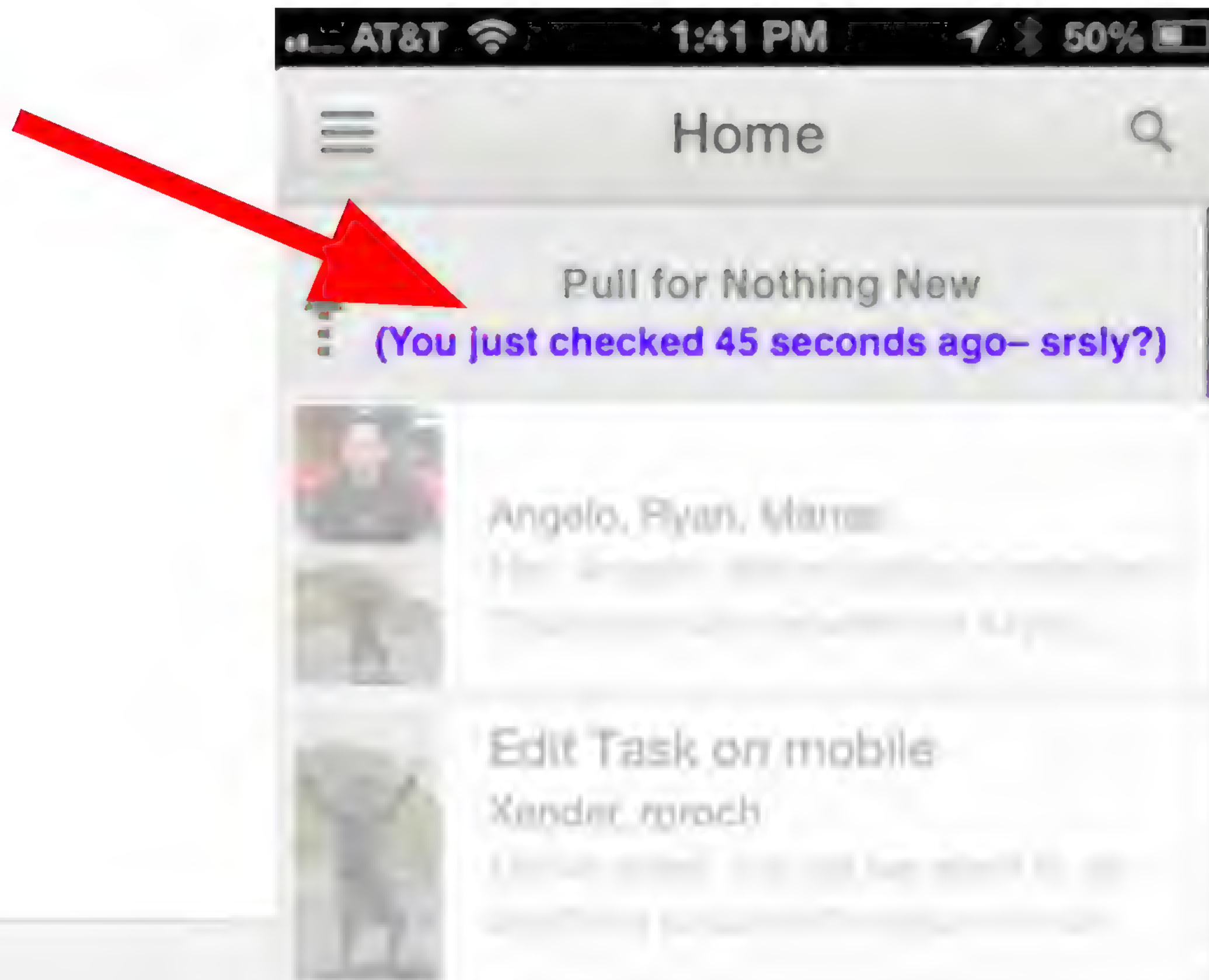
Intermittent (vs. predictable) rewards are the most addictive, and hardest to stop

(it's why slot machines make the most money at casinos)

are we deciding to pull for new email?



... or do we do it to feel the intermittent rewards?



... are we **swiping**
two fingers to scroll?



... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



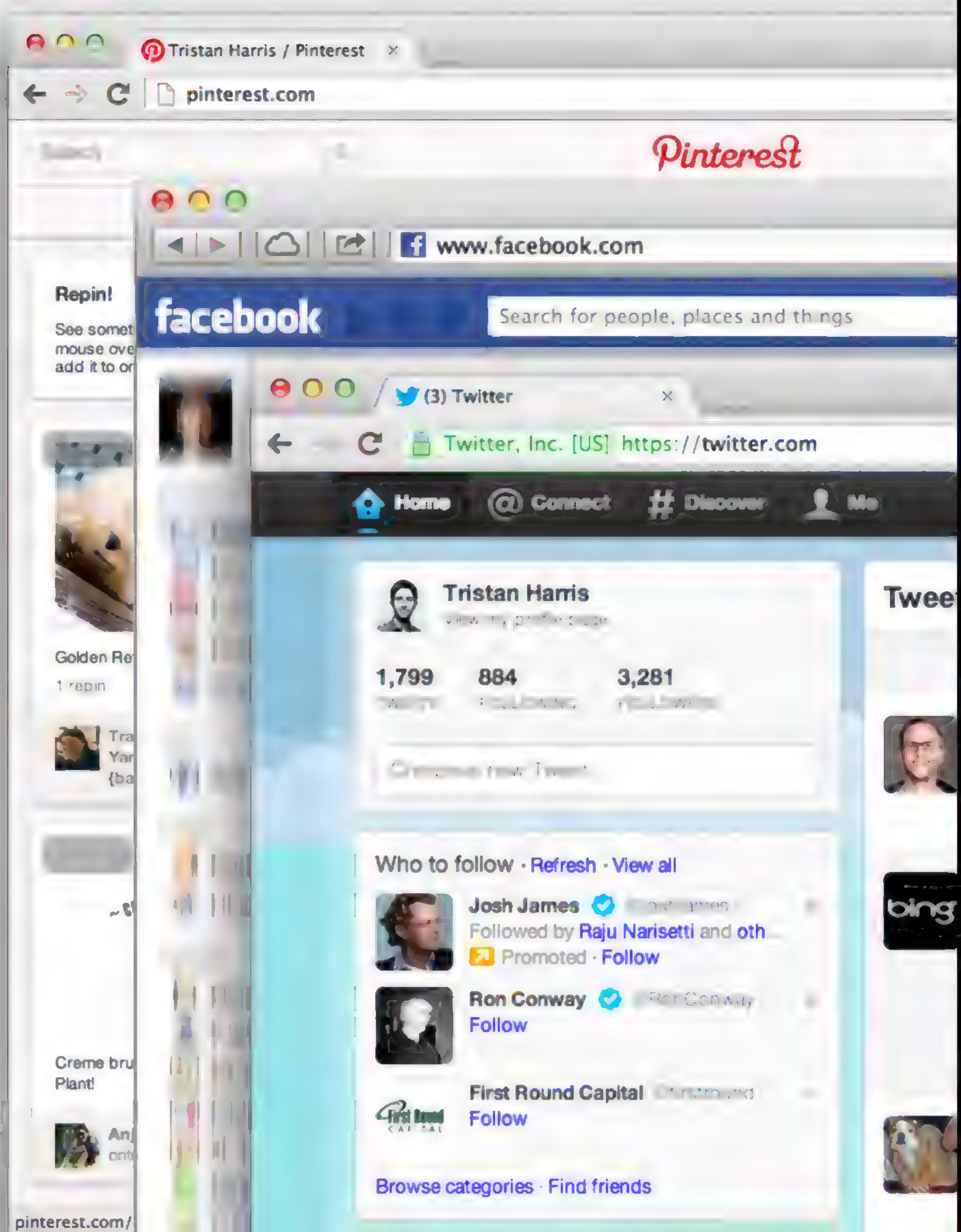
Google

... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



Google

... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



These are attention casinos...



...because the house always wins.

We spend lots of time – are we getting the same value back?



Instead, what if we designed to
minimize the presence of
intermittent variable rewards, and
reduce addictions?

Vulnerability #3: Loss-Aversion (aka Fear of Missing Out)

Suppose we actually
wanted to stop checking
all this stuff....



**Loss-aversion won't let us,
because we'd be terrified of missing
something important**

so we're forced to live as if every
message could be this...



instead of this...



A low-angle, slightly blurred photograph of a group of people running on a line of treadmills in a gym. The runners are wearing athletic gear, including orange leggings and grey sneakers. The treadmills are dark grey with silver handrails. The background is out of focus, showing more of the gym environment.

Keeping us on a treadmill
of continuous checking

Instead, what if we designed to
give users confidence that they
could disconnect more often, and
not miss something important?

Vulnerability #4:
Fast vs. Slow Thinking
(aka Mindful vs. Mindless behavior)

Humans make different decisions
when we **pause and consider**,
vs. when we **react immediately**.



When access to the next hit is
too frictionless, we *lose the ability*
to consider before acting...



When scrolling is **frictionless**, we don't **think** before we flick to see what's next...



or when it's
so frictionless,
we don't think
before we grab our
phone after it
buzzes



© 2008 DIET IMAGINE, Inc.



...or so frictionless, we don't think before getting a snack after an urge.

When we **lose that moment to consider**
before acting on our impulses...



... we lose what sets us apart as
thinking humans.

Instead, what if we designed to help users be **fast and efficient**, while leaving *enough friction* for users to **pause and consider**?



...just like Google
makes unhealthy food
available, but puts them
inside jars and slightly
out of sight

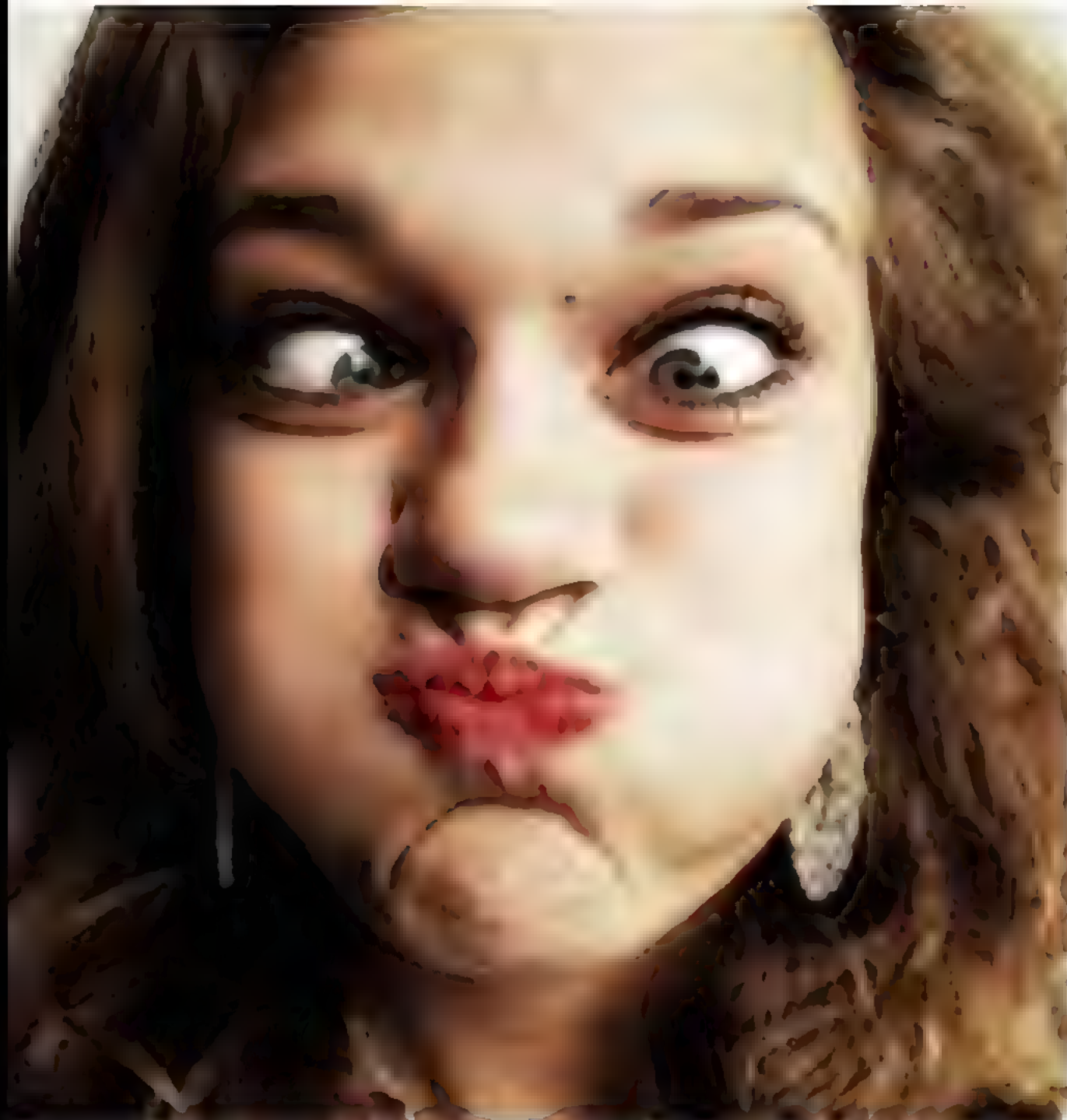
(in other words, behind a **speed bump**)

Vulnerability #5: Stress & Altered States

(aka “I'm not in the best state of mind to decide...”)

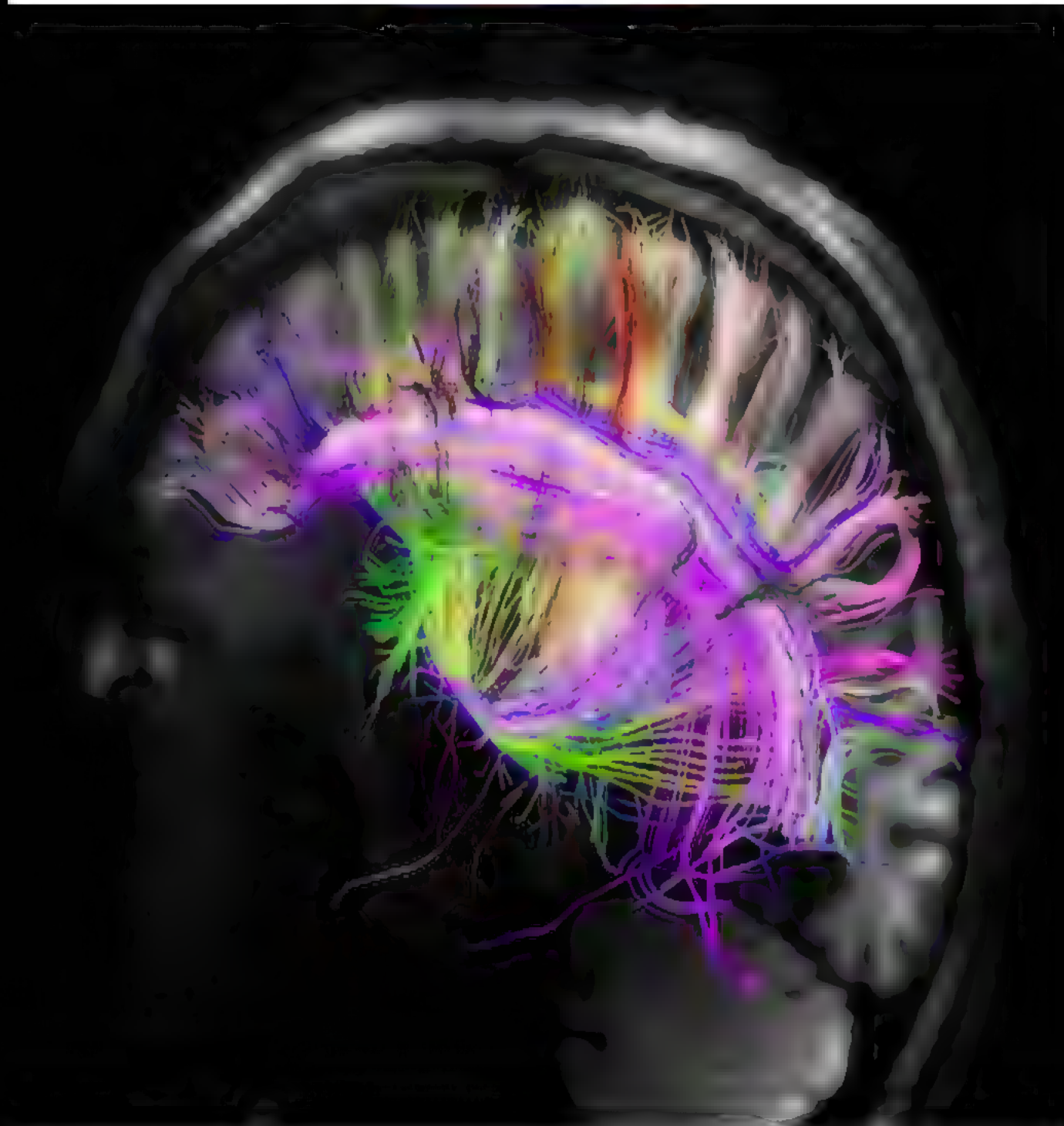
It's not just how technology changes
what we do...

It's also how it changes
our physiological state...



We actually
stop breathing when
we read our email...

(an effect known as “email apnea”)



...our
**sympathetic
nervous system**
is activated



**...causing our liver
to dump glucose
and cholesterol
into our blood...**

...our heart rate increases...



...and our body prepares for a
fight or flight response





SEARCH MAIL

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Move to ▾

Labels ▾

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1 - 15 of 15



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Starred

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Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat

Hiking F

Set status here ▾

Call phone

Arielle

Emily

Jason

Michael

Paul



Jason Cornwell

» Please return my stapler - Hi, You seem to have taken my stapler. Please

1:10 pm



Paul McDonald

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Mar 24



Michael Bolognino

» This weekend - Hi there. Let's meet up at 8PM tonight for burgers and then t

Mar 24



Arielle Reinstein

» dipsea trail - When it stops raining I really want to hike the Dipsea Trail again

Mar 24



Jason Toff

» How are you? - Hey there! We haven't spoken in a while. How are you? Wou

Mar 24



Jr Wikane

» VW Auction in Tacoma - Hi, I was doing a search on Google for VW's in Tac

Mar 6



Gmail

» mail - Hi, I was doing a search on Google for VW's in Tac

Mar 6

And all that happens between when
we read our 1st email.



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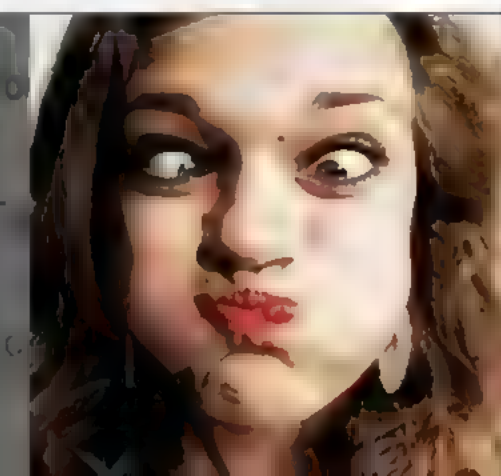
Jason Toff

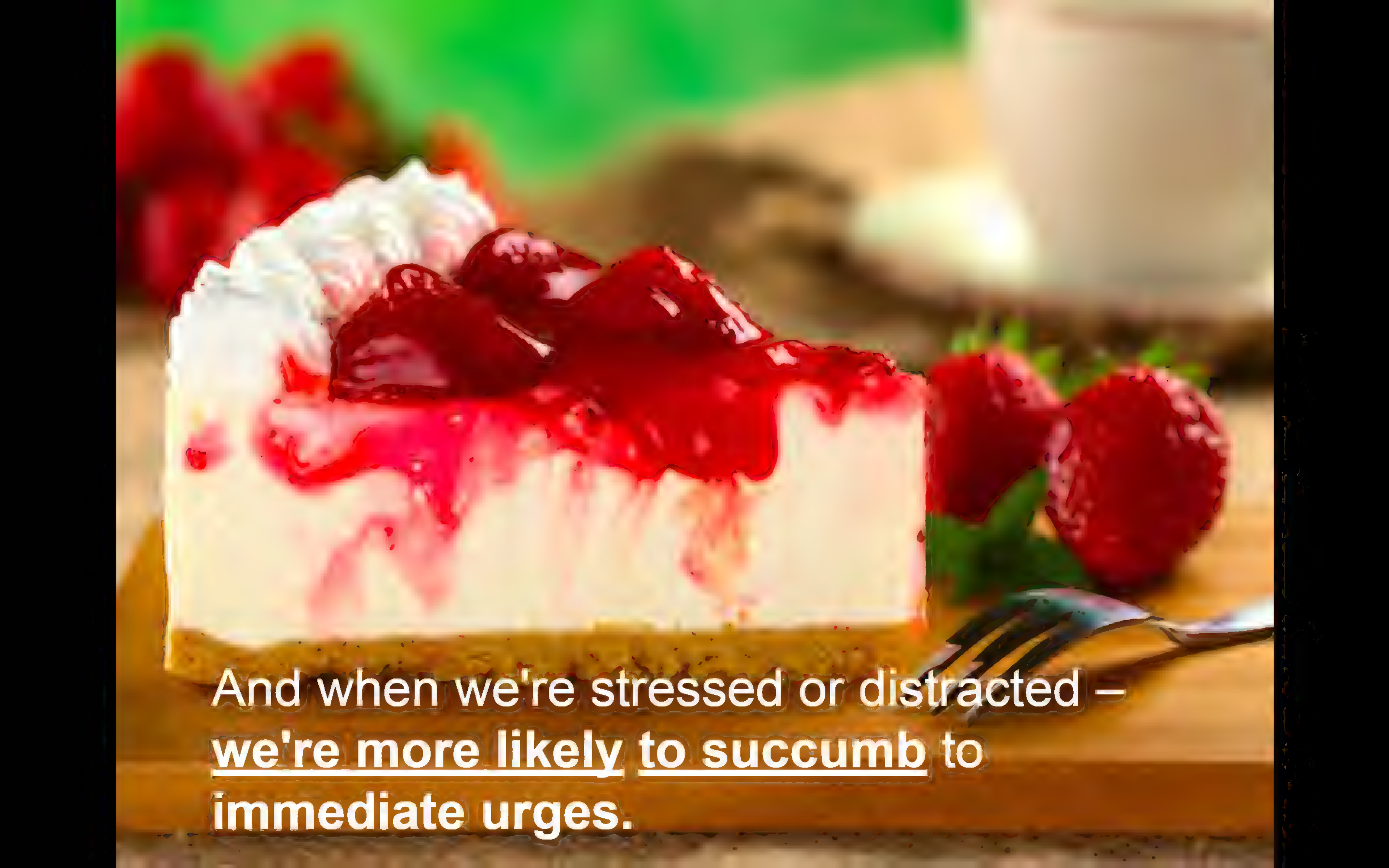
» How are you? - Hey there. We haven't spoken in a while. How are you? Wo

and when we read our 10th email...

Google Voice

» New voicemail from (610) 810-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from (610) 810-




A close-up photograph of a slice of cheesecake. The slice is rectangular and sits on a thin layer of golden-brown crust. The filling is a smooth, off-white cream. It is topped with a dollop of whipped cream on the left side, a drizzle of thick red raspberry sauce, and several fresh raspberries. The sauce is also drizzled down the side of the slice. To the right of the slice, two more fresh raspberries are visible. A silver fork lies on the wooden surface in the foreground, partially obscured by the text. The background is a soft-focus kitchen scene with a green wall and a white countertop.

And when we're stressed or distracted –
we're more likely to succumb to
immediate urges.

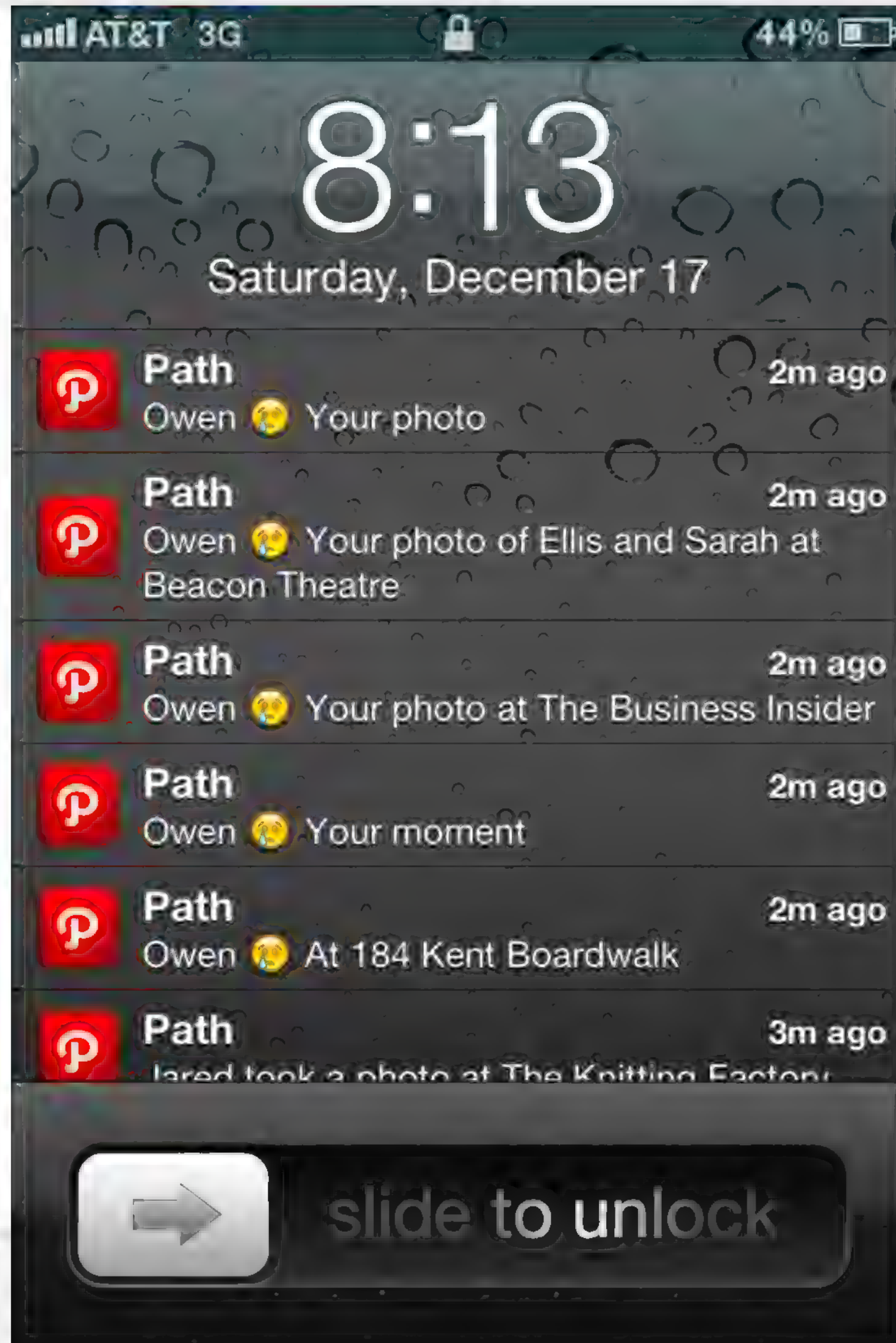
Do we really know what we're
doing to people?

Instead, what if we designed to
minimize stress and create
calmer states of mind?

The problem is...

A man in a dark suit and tie is in a starting crouch on a reddish-brown track with white lane markings. He is looking directly at the camera with a determined expression. In the background, another person in a dark suit is also in a starting crouch, slightly out of focus. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Successful products compete by exploiting these vulnerabilities, so they can't remove them without sacrificing their success and growth.



...creating an
arms race that
causes companies to
find more reasons to
steal people's time



**A tragedy of the commons
that destroys our common silence,
and ability to think.**

So...

what's the solution to all this?



As a former entrepreneur, I can say that niche startups are **too small** to tackle this challenge...

Change like this can only happen **top-down**,
from large institutions that define the
standards for millions of people...

Google

And we're in **a great position** to do something about all this...



ANDROID

We set the notification standards on
>50% of the world's mobile phones...

(4 trillion notifications sent last year on iOS alone)

A first-person perspective from inside a car. A hand holds a smartphone in the center of the frame, displaying a messaging app with a keyboard visible. The driver's hand is on the steering wheel. The background shows a road with a white car ahead and a blue highway sign, all blurred to indicate motion.

we shape **> 11 billion interruptions** to
people's lives **every day...**
(this is nuts!)

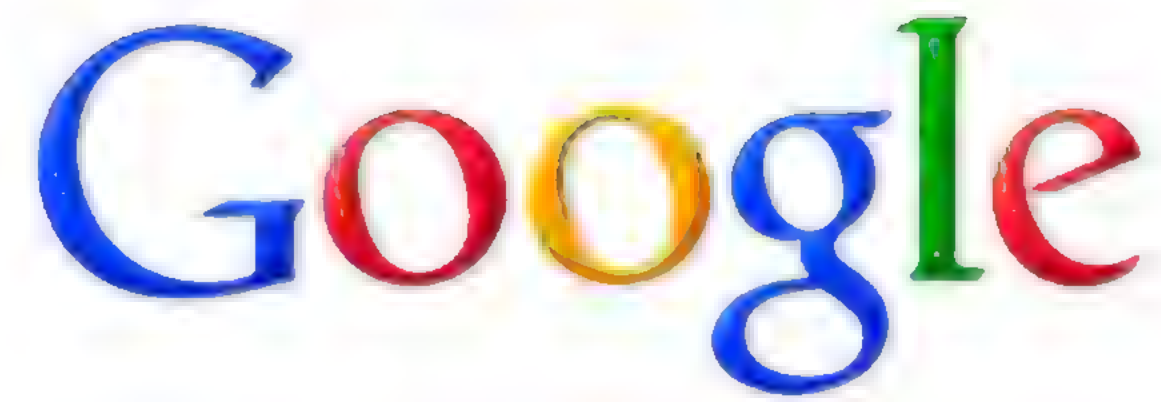


**Millions of knowledge workers spend
1/3rd of their day in our email product.**



**Hundreds of millions of people
live in Chrome every day**

...and we have **fortunate** incentives.

[Google Search](#)[I'm Feeling Lucky](#)

Unlike many companies, our primary business model is **fulfilling human needs (searches)**, and *getting people on with their lives.*



not stealing more
of your time.



Just like we trust our doctors to do what's
best and healthy for us

A group of medical students in blue graduation gowns and caps, holding books and raising their hands in a gesture of oath-taking.

who swear by the hippocratic oath to
use their knowledge ethically and to do
no harm.

...and just like we trust farmers to
sell us **safe and healthy food**



...and **ask careful questions** before making decisions that could affect our health





...because all we
can do is buy what
shows up at the
supermarket

Consumers

trust



...to make **conscious decisions**

**...since we choose the systems
and defaults that shape their lives**

**We already care about speed and productivity,
and helping users get sh*t done...**



Let's also care about **minimizing distractions and interruptions.**

**We can design to reduce the
volume and frequency of interruptions.**


We can design to be **respectful** about *when* to notify users— let it wait, unless it's important

We can design to **keep users focused**, by putting temptations further away when they're trying to accomplish goals.

We can batch up notifications & messages into **digests by default**, instead of one at a time



Clearly, these are thorny issues...



There are tough moral questions,
competition-driven industry pressures,
and nuanced human psychology factors...



KENNEDY

... but just like we had a team to
standardize our design *aesthetic*
across the company ...

We could have a team to
standardize our design *ethics* and
define best practices to minimize distraction.

LOG IN or JOIN

Breaking: BlackBerry Z10 review: a new life, or life support?

THE VERGE

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Apogee focuses on the iPad with updated One, Duet, and Quartet multichannel...

NEXT STORY

Lenovo may be a suitor for RIM's smartphone business

APPROXIMATELY 100% OF OUR VISITORS USE A BROWSER

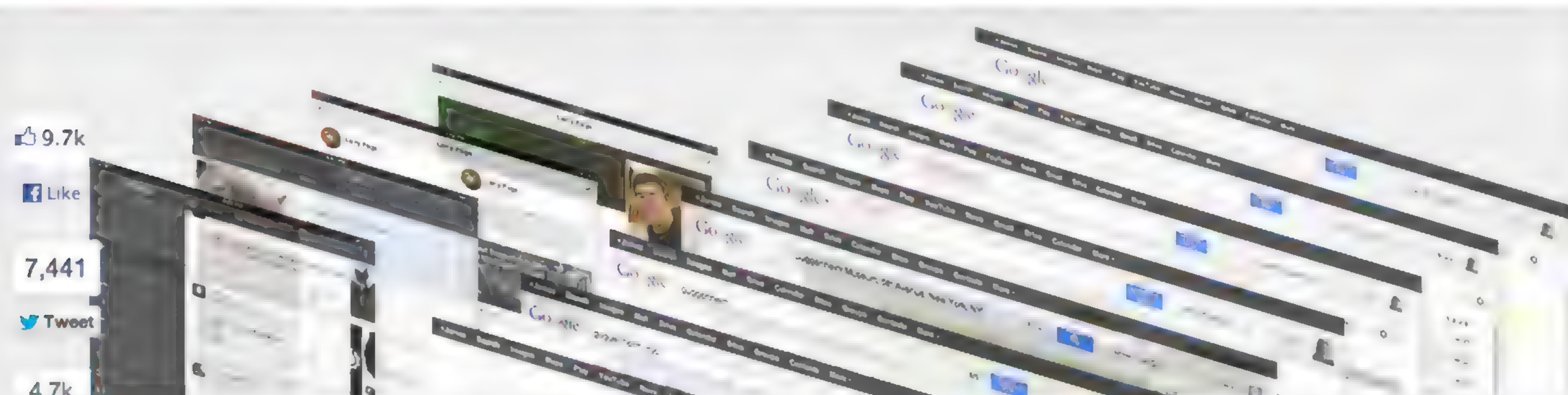
685

COMMENTS

Google's New Team Tackles Distraction and Consumer Well-Being

A new group is making sure Google's products aren't just great, but actually make people happy.

By **Verge Staff** on January 24, 2013 12:06 pm



But we can't wait any longer
to figure it out.

Join the Community: Attention-Respectful Googlers

(...now 1500+ Googlers and growing!)

or visit:
[go/attention-respectful](https://www.google.com/go/attention-respectful)

Send in the most distracting
aspects of products in your life.

(screenshots or descriptions are fine)

How would you change them?

How could we do more to respect the
user's attention?

And share this presentation with your
co-workers... start a conversation!

[go/distraction](#)

Appendix & Links

There's of great thinkers and experts who would be eager to help us work through these tough questions (from many different ages, backgrounds, genders)...

- BJ Fogg
- Linda Stone
- Kelly McGonigal
- Kathy Sierra
- Dan Ariely
- Daniel Kahneman
- Sherry Turkle
- Gloria Mark
- Neema Moraveji, Stanford Calming Tech lab
- Wisdom 2.0 conference

Many even at Google!

- Hal Varian, Chief Economist @ Google
- John Boyd, author of "The Time Paradox"
- Joe Kraus ("[Culture of Distraction](#)", partner at Google Ventures)
- Google Ideas

There are some great books, articles, etc on the subjects of Willpower, Ego Depletion, Habit formation, Addiction, Pleasure, Psychophysics, Free Will, etc:

- "The Illusion of Conscious Will" by Daniel Wegner
- "Amusing Ourselves to Death" by Neil Postman
- "Thinking Fast And Slow" by Daniel Kahneman
- "Flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- "The Willpower Instinct" by Kelly McGonigal
- "Compass of Pleasure" by David Linden
- "Alone Together" by Sherry Turkle
- "[Diagnosis: Email Apnea](#)" by Linda Stone
- "[Is Twitter TOO Good?](#)" by Kathy Sierra
- "The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change your Life" by John Boyd and Philip Zimbardo